

Jennie Donahue Dobson, One of Muskegon's First Female Doctors

Jennie was born in Ottawa, Canada in 1840. She was one of seven children born to Mary and Michael Donahue of Irish descent. Jennie was educated at Catholic convents there before the family moved to Muskegon, Michigan around 1860.

By 1870, her father Michael was in business with John Riordan in a women's dry goods store called Donahue & Riordan, a partnership that lasted until 1877. During this time, Jennie and her younger sister Anna operated their own millinery business. Whether their business was in conjunction with Donahue & Riordan is not known. Anna married John Riordan in 1871.

Captain Henry Dobson was born in Canada in 1835. He was an early Muskegon settler and as an adult he commanded a steamer on the Great Lakes. During the Civil War he was part of the 26th Michigan Volunteers and was well known for his military accomplishments. He was discharged in 1864 after being seriously injured by a bullet wound that lodged in his chest. Upon returning to Muskegon, he continued his work as a vessel captain. He married Jennie Donahue in 1870. Six years later Captain Dobson died as a result of an infection caused by his war injury.

Soon after the Captain's death, Jennie decided to follow her dream and went back to school to become a physician. She studied at the University of Michigan and the Women's Medical College in Chicago. After graduating, she became the house physician at the Women's & Children's Hospital and attended various college clinics in Chicago. Upon leaving Chicago, she studied for a short time in Europe.

In 1881, Jennie returned to Muskegon and started her practice here where she was a very successful doctor. During her career, she was a member of the 9th District Michigan State Women's Christian Temperance Association, a member of the Society of Microscopists, a member of Muskegon Woman's Club, and on the Executive Committee of the Michigan State Medical Society where she served as Vice President.

In 1890, she built a beautiful home and office off the corner of 1st and Webster next to Dr. John Denslow's residence. She continued her practice there until 1896 when she died of pneumonia after a short two-week illness. Part of her obituary in the Muskegon Chronicle read, "Mrs. Dobson was a woman of strong character, energetic, persevering, helpful and kindly to all her professional and social relations, rewarded for these good qualities by the love of a wide circle of friends, the respect and esteem of the community in which she pursued so many helpful activities. She was a devout member of the Catholic church, belonging to St. Mary's parish, a leading spirit in its labors and councils. Her influence and abilities were freely lent to the cause of temperance, of woman's advancement, and other movements which enlist the aid of the progressive workers in all lands and climes. In all these circles her pleasant voice and ready aid will be missed. Of her it can with entire truth be said that she was a model of many virtues, one of those intelligent, patient, persevering, self-reliant characters which compel respect, and leave an aching void in many hearts when at last called to the larger activities of the wider world beyond".

Sources include: Ancestry.com, Genealogy Bank, Find A Grave, Newspapers.com, Michigan State Historical Society Historical Vol. 28, and Advantages & Surroundings of Muskegon, MI.